NOAA CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Sea Floor Characterization of the U.S. Caribbean
2011 Field Season
Day 7: April 3, 2011

Meet Nick

Nick Przyuski here taking my first crack at the daily blog. I am 28 years old and currently in a master's program at the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management at the University of California in Santa Barbara. This is my first trip aboard the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* with the Biogeography Branch and my primary role is working with the ground validation team.

Ground validation, also known as ground truthing, is used to assess the accuracy of the acoustic imagery by acquiring video and photographic footage of benthic habitats that have previously been mapped. Ground truthing aids mapmakers in understanding not only the precision of their acoustic images but also in identifying seafloor features with indistinguishable acoustic signatures. This task is completed in one of two ways; through either deploying the ROV from the *Nancy Foster* or utilizing a drop camera, a digital video camera attached to a long cable, on a small boat launched from the main ship.



Tim Battista (left) and Nick Przyusk prep the small boat for a day of ground truthing with the drop camera (far left); Nick and Tim wait for the boat to be deployed (center); and they're off for another day of ocean exploration (right)!

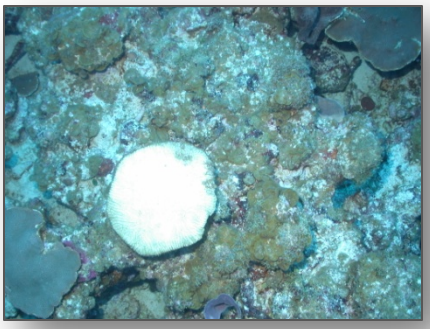
Today's Agenda

This morning began with small boat operations commencing at 8:00 am. The drop camera team of Tim Battista, our trusty pilot Jon Hoisington and myself conducted two separate operations today in the areas south east of Vieques and Culebra, islands off the eastern edge of Puerto Rico. The seas had calmed overnight, a welcomed respite from the tumultuous conditions of the previous two days. In addition to calm seas, the validation sites were of a shallower depth making the small boat work a breeze today.

An outlook on the rich corals south of St. John. Photo taken during the ROV ground validation operations.

During our drop camera activities Tim observed a high percentage of coral cover, with certain sites as high as 90% and in particular there appeared to be a large proportion of plate corals, although there was also a distinct lack of fish life.

The ROV ground truthing team confirmed his assertion of high coral cover, during their four surveyed lines today all of which were in close proximity to the drop camera activities. Unfortunately both teams noticed a high degree of coral bleaching in the area that was most likely associated with coral disease, either White-band Disease or possibly the White Plague.



A coral exhibiting bleaching or disease.

In Other News…

Team Multibeam is going to take the controls of the *Nancy Foster* for the remainder of the day's activities. They will have until midnight tonight to acquire more acoustic imagery data before handing over the helm to Chris Taylor for his work involving acoustic monitoring of fisheries biomass.

Today's Underwater Photos

Photos of the coral reefs observed off the southern coast of St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands. These photos were captured with the ROV. Enjoy!